



Wisconsin State Senate

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Testimony of Senator John Lehman

Assembly Bill 496

Senate Committee on Transportation, Tourism, Forestry, and Natural Resources

February 11, 2010

Chair Holperin and committee members, thank you for the opportunity to offer testimony in support of Assembly Bill 496 (AB 496) – banning texting or e-mailing while driving.

Advances in technology and changes in the way we communicate with each other have led to the proliferation of mobile texting and e-mail devices and, for certain folks, what seems like their almost constant use.

Research conclusively shows that texting or e-mailing while driving is one of the most dangerous things you can do behind the wheel of a vehicle. Across the nation and in Wisconsin, significant attention is being paid to updating driving safety laws in recognition of the widespread use of mobile texting and e-mail devices and the negative effects of their use on the safety of drivers engaging in the behavior, their passengers and others on our roads.

As amended and passed overwhelmingly by the Assembly the bill resolves concerns about unintended impacts on HAM radio operators certain safety and notification systems included on vehicles like the GM OnStar and Ford's SmartAlert.

While similar, this bill differs from Senate Bill 103 that many members of this committee voted in favor of in committee and when it was before the full Senate. The texting or e-mailing ban in AB 496 is limited to the narrower (as defined by state statute) act of "driving" instead of the broader "operating" used in SB 103. For example under AB 496 you could legally text in a running but parked motor vehicle. In addition, AB 496 allows for more severe penalties for repeat offenses and requires driver education materials and courses to provide information about the hazards of driving while texting or e-mailing.

Because of the proven, dramatic increase in the likelihood a texting driver will be involved in or cause an accident, Assembly Bill 496 makes clear that texting or e-mailing while driving a car is not legal in Wisconsin. I hope the committee will see fit to advance this important safety legislation.

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